

Robert Hamilton Alway, M.D. 1912-1990

Early Friday morning, October 26, 1990, whispered words from friend to friend spread the sad news of Robert H. Alway's death in Oak Harbor, Washington, at age 77. The dismay and sorrow of his passing underscored what his friends and colleagues knew so well, the deep and abiding place he held in the affections of the Stanford medical family and former students, and in the work of the Stanford University School of Medicine.

Alway was a professor and chairman of the Department of Pediatrics from 1953 to 1957 and served as dean of the school from 1957 to 1964. In 1959 he led the planning of the school's move from San Francisco, where it had been located since 1908, to a newly constructed medical center complex on the Stanford University campus. From this new location Alway guided the school's redevelopment.

He knew how to lead without dictating and how to foster a collective leadership. He was also noted for making up his mind when decisions were called for. When Alway became dean, the school's department heads submitted their resignations as a matter of course. On the theory that the school had been weakened by too much scholastic inbreeding in San Francisco (some department heads and faculty had simple floated to the top on the strength of longevity), Alway accepted them and went scouting for new talent.

He quickly recruited a dazzling array of faculty. They included Nobel Prize winning geneticist Joshua Lederberg from the University of Wisconsin and the entire microbiology department of Washington University in St. Louis, led by biochemist Arthur Kornberg, who also received a Nobel Prize. Alway created a new department of genetics, added new professors and instituted a new and innovative five-year curriculum.

Alway's leadership was marked by courage, integrity and devotion to principle. Excellence was the key and appointments to the faculty were dictated solely by "the best individual for the job." Himself a clinician without extensive research experience, he held that research is the lifeline of medicine and vigorously supported its development in the curriculum and at the laboratory bench and bedside. Yet during those formative years there was no decrease in emphasis on heeding the faint cry of the patient as an individual or as a member of the community. Integrity, scholarship, compassion were in the forefront of his administration.

Through these initiatives, almost overnight the Stanford University School of Medicine was catapulted to national prominence. The school began to attract medical faculty whose talents and prestige enabled them to bring funds as well as a measure of independence. But the school also developed a distinctive mission in medical education as an institution fully integrated with a vigorous university which was beginning to approach maturity as a great university of world rather than regional reputation. The School of Medicine contributed significantly to this reputation as a world-renowned center of research and pioneer of university-based medical education, integrating medical care with teaching provided by a full-time faculty.

The scientific foundations of medicine spring from chemistry, physics, mathematics and the biological sciences, which support medicine through the preclinical sciences. The school's proximity to the University made the need for closer integration with other university

Robert Alway, M.D., who served as dean of the School of Medicine from 1957 to 1964, greeted each year's entering class by saying, "If you haven't got philosophical training, the implications of medicine will undoubtedly escape you." Although a clinician, Alway was known for his support of medical research.



departments more compelling. Alway encouraged it. The areas forming closer links during his era ranged from the humanities and the behavioral sciences to the biological sciences, engineering and physics. "Medical schools must provide a thread of continuity from the humanities and social sciences to the basic medical sciences and clinical training before the doctorate of medicine is awarded," Alway wrote in a 1963 essay. "A university setting may better ensure students of medicine to become pioneers in advancing biomedical knowledge and to master the art of medical practice."

Accordingly, the preclinical years changed and the students were introduced to the social context of medicine. The Bay Road Project for low-income families, undertaken in collaboration with the Department of Health and Welfare of San Mateo County, provided the nucleus of a research and demonstration program in family and community medicine. A Division of Rehabilitation Medicine delineated the social and community problems of the disabling consequences of disease and taught students the therapeutic approaches to these problems. Finally, grouping the School of Physical Therapy, the Division of Social Work, and the Division of Speech Pathology and Audiology into a single Department of Allied Medical Sciences made it easier to integrate social context into the educational programs of the school. The physical plant and fiscal limitations that in later years would lead succeeding deans to eliminate these programs does not invalidate Alway's vision. The school has remained incomplete as a result, and there is currently renewed interest and commitment to addressing the void in social and community approaches to the practice of medicine.

When he became dean, Alway initiated conversations with the Palo Alto medical community to orient them to the needs of the school. During his tenure the clinical departments developed working contacts with a host of community agencies, including the Santa Clara Valley Medical Center in San Jose; Children's Hospital at Stanford (now Packard Hospital); Children's Health Council; San Mateo Community Hospital (now Chope Hospital); and the Palo Alto Veterans Administration Medical Center. Those affiliations continue today.

One of Alway's goals was to establish the highest quality of patient care in all of the clinical departments. Particularly noteworthy were the achievements in those patient care areas that by their very nature require teamwork by several departments. They included open-heart surgery, cardiology and organ transplantation; diagnostic radiology,

which contributed to major refinements in techniques to minimize diagnostic error; and the cancer radiotherapy program, developed by the late Henry S. Kaplan and his colleagues, that achieved unsurpassed long-term results in the treatment of Hodgkin's disease and other forms of cancer.

In 1962, the National Institute of Health awarded the Department of Pediatrics a grant establishing the first clinical research center for premature infants under the the directorship of Drs. Norman Kretchmer and Sumner Yaffe. The participating departments were anesthesiology, anthropology, pediatrics, gynecology and obstetrics, neurology, medicine, and psychiatry. Another grant, this one from the Hartford Foundation, led to a nationally recognized program of research on psoriasis under the directorship of Dr. Eugene M. Farber. The departments of genetics and pediatrics developed a broad-based program for the study of basic aspects of mental retardation. A Kennedy Foundation grant created laboratories for the study of molecular medicine which involved clinicians and basic scientists working to transfer concepts from the bench to the bedside. Other participating departments were biochemistry, medicine and neurology. Although the Kennedy laboratories no longer exist, the concept of melding basic research and its transfer to the bedside were the forerunners of Beckman Center for Molecular and Genetic Medicine and the Howard Hughes Medical Institute constructed in 1987.

At the fundamental level the faculty of both clinical and basic science departments made contributions in many fields, including behavioral physiology, radiobiology, carcinogenesis, autoimmune disease, neurophysiology, endocrinology, and pharmacology. An interdisciplinary group representing the departments of genetics, medicine, radiology and surgery aimed a concerted attack on the problems of organ transplantation through laboratory investigations on the mechanism of graft rejections, on the suppression of immune response, and on the characterization of histocompatibility antigens. Four years later Stanford became the leading center of cardiac transplantation in the world.

Alway was born December 10, 1912, at University Place, Nebraska. A graduate of the University of Minnesota Medical School, he joined the Stanford medical faculty in 1949 after teaching six years at the University of Utah Medical School. He became chairman of the Department of Pediatrics at the University of Colorado in 1953, but later, encouraged by the contemplated relocation plans for the school, he returned to head Stanford's Department of Pediatrics. After stepping down from the deanship in 1964, Alway served as acting chairman of pediatrics and later as medical director of Stanford University Hospital until his retirement in 1977.

In 1942, Alway married Sophia Chamberlin, also a pediatrician. They have three daughters, Anne Loewe of Alexander, Alaska; Maria Connors of Vancouver, British Columbia; and Joan Alway of Arlington, Massachusetts; two sons, Frederick of Mount Vernon, Washington; and Theodore of Peshastin, Washington; and nine grandchildren.

In 1988, the building which houses the administration of the School of Medicine was named the Robert H. Alway Building in his honor. The plaque inscription outside the building reads: "He led the faculty in establishing and consolidating the School of Medicine on the Stanford campus, and in the drive to achieve excellence in the medical sciences."

**Spyros Andreopoulos, chair
Avram Goldstein
Ruth T. Gross**